



PERCIEVED WAGE DISPARITY IN THE ACADEMIC WORKFORCE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This case study explored the impact of perceived wage disparity on employee motivation in academia. A participant sample of 33 University of Bridgeport faculty, administrators, and staff responded to a survey consisting of 10 multiple choice and open-ended questions and the data were analyzed using qualitative coding. The study’s findings revealed that in addition to inequitable wage structures employees tend to associate wage disparity with unbalanced workload. In addition, while almost all respondents confirmed wage disparity had no impact on their motivation, they also appreciate monetary rewards for their efforts. Recommendations include the implementation of a transparent pay scale to remove perceived bias. Gaps in literature are also highlighted that provide a guide for future research.

Research Design

- This case study focused on current employees of the University of Bridgeport (UB).
- A questionnaire consisting of 10 multiple choice and open-ended questions was administered through the SurveyMonkey internet platform.
- Out of a sample size 55 employees, a total of 33 (66%) participants completed the survey:

Category	Description	Tally	Percentage
Gender	Male	20	60.61%
	Female	13	39.39%
	Other	0	0.00%
Role	Faculty	22	66.67%
	Administrative	8	24.24%
	Neither Faculty nor Administrative	3	9.09%
Total		33	66%

Introduction

- Wage disparity is disproportionate pay between workers holding the same position and comparable skills within an organization and across the labor market. Although wage disparity is proven to exist, there is no consensus regarding the source of wage differences in academia. It is notable that some factors play a dominant role in creating wage gaps in key areas including discipline, experience and rank.
- Empirical research has devoted substantial attention to wage disparity in academia, but few studies focus on investigating the effects of perceived wage disparity on motivation. This is important because the relationship between wage differences and motivation could indicate an interplay between an employee’s personal motivation and the socioeconomic environment in the higher education industry.
- The issue of wage disparity and motivation in academia is unique compared to other service industries. First, research on motivation must consider three groups of workers (faculty, administration and staff). Second, academia exhibits a complex, abstruse environment often characterized by a lack of transparency and role clarity. This tends to create ambiguous approaches to work and pay allocation which increases perceptions of bias and inequity among employees.
- The Equity Theory affirms if institutions are not accountable for providing their employees with a clear method for determining wages employees tend to perceive inequity and become demotivated.

Areas For Future Research

- Future research should focus on these areas:
- Motivation among administrative staff.
 - The impact of unofficial sources of wage information on employee motivation.
 - Testing The Equity Theory in academia.

Findings

- Many respondents perceived wage disparity at UB and confirmed the institution’s wage structures are vague with large wage differences between disciplines.
- Respondents tended to believe wage disparity reflected an unbalanced workload and inequitable distribution of wages among peers.
- Almost all female respondents attributed perceived wage gaps to gender disparity.
- Despite strong overall confirmation of wage disparity among respondents, 7 out of 33 (21.21%) respondents were adamant wage disparity does not exist.
- Of the 26 (78.78%) employees that recognized wage disparity, 18 (69.23%) confirmed their motivation remained unaffected. This challenges The Equity Theory.
- Of the 26 employees that recognized wage disparity, 8 (30.77%) said they feel “profoundly demotivated”. This appears to be an indicator of unrest.

Recommendations

- Establish transparent pay criteria subject to annual review to mitigate employee perceptions of bias.
- If financial challenges remain a concern for UB, consider alternative motivational strategies to moderate the negative impact of wage disparity including emphasis on work-life balance, equitable distribution of workload and stipends.
- Include employees in decision making and develop comprehensive communication strategies.

References

This document is a research summary of an M.B.A. thesis. A full reference list is available upon request.